



## ADA Facts

# DEPRESSANTS

The effects of Depressants are in many ways similar to the effects of alcohol. Small amounts can produce calmness and relaxed muscles, but larger doses can cause slurred speech, staggering gait, and altered perception. Very large doses can cause respiratory depression, coma, and even death. The combination of depressants and alcohol can multiply the effects of the drugs, greatly increasing the risks.

There are three primary groups of depressants: barbiturates, methaqualone, and tranquilizers.

### ▼ Barbiturates

Barbiturates are central nervous system depressants that are prescribed for many therapeutic purposes, including sleep disorders, anxiety, and seizure disorders. Barbiturates are used nonmedically to help people relax or sleep, to induce a sense of euphoria, or to counteract the adverse effects of other drugs. They are usually marketed in capsules or tablets. However, they are also available in a liquid form or suppositories. Physical effects of long-term use of barbiturates include: chronic fatigue; slurred speech; poor coordination; visual disturbances; extreme dizziness; slower reflexes; reduced sex drive and impotence; menstrual irregularities; and respiratory disorders.

### ▼ Methaqualone

Methaqualone was originally prescribed to reduce anxiety and also as a sleeping aid. It is one of the most commonly abused drugs and can cause both physical and psychological dependence. Large doses (more than 300 mg.) result in an intense euphoria. Some users can also experience poor motor coordination, slurred speech, weakness, disorientation and panic. Very high doses can also lead to respiratory depression, abnormally rapid heart rate, tremor of the hands and legs, and muscular rigidity. Acute overdose can result in delirium, seizures, coma, and in some instances death. Methaqualone is a white, bitter-tasting crystalline powder, usually made into tablets or capsules.

### ▼ Tranquilizers

Tranquilizers are central nervous system depressants that are legally obtainable only by prescription. Physicians prescribe them to treat anxiety, insomnia, and skeletal muscle spasms. Low doses of tranquilizers may cause drowsiness and a sense of well-being. High doses can produce: impaired thinking and memory; emotional instability; altered perceptions; slurred speech; and staggered gait and poor motor coordination. Because tranquilizers can affect the way the mind and muscles work

together, use of these drugs can cause blurred or double vision and impaired muscular coordination. Some users may experience overstimulation, hallucinations, insomnia, nightmares and rage. Tranquilizers appear as white, off-white or light yellow crystalline powders, usually in pills or capsules of a variety of colors.

Driving while under the influence of these depressants is very hazardous. Also, babies born to mothers who abuse these drugs are at risk for birth defects and behavioral problems.

**BE AWARE THAT DEPRESSANTS TAKEN WITH ALCOHOL CAN BE LETHAL!**



For more information,  
contact the  
Missouri Department of  
Mental Health,  
Division of  
Alcohol and Drug Abuse  
P.O. Box 687  
1706 East Elm  
Jefferson City, MO 65102  
573-751-4942  
or 1-800-364-9687  
[www.modmh.state.mo.us](http://www.modmh.state.mo.us)



***Source: Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, 1993.***